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Sweden Withdraws Proposal on Climate Friendly Food Choices

Report Categories:

Trade Policy Monitoring

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Report Highlights:

The Swedish Government has decided to withdraw the National Food Administration's proposal to the EU on guidelines for climate friendly food choices. The EU Commission found that the recommendations to eat more locally produced food contravene the EU's principles for the free movement of goods and asked Sweden to revise the guidelines.

General Information:

The Swedish Government has decided to withdraw the National Food Administration's (NFA) proposal to the EU on guidelines for climate friendly food choices. According to Inger Andersson, NFA's Director General, free trade was considered more important than the environment.

NFA would have liked a trial to find out whether the benefits of the guidelines outweigh any possible effects on trade. "There is a big demand for information that can help consumers to make food choices that are good both from a health and an environmental aspect, says Inger Andersson."

In May 2009, NFA submitted a proposal on guidelines for climate friendly food choices to the EU. Recommendations included eating locally produced meat, chicken, fruits, vegetables and berries, eating sustainable fish, avoiding bottled water and palm oil, limiting rice consumption as it produces large amounts of methane. The proposal was sent out for reactions from other EU-countries. The EU Commission and Romania found that the guidelines would encourage Swedish consumers to choose locally produced products at the expense of products from other countries, which contravenes the principles of free movement of goods in the EU internal market.

Subsequently, NFA, in cooperation with the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Board of Agriculture, revised the guidelines. For example, the wording "domestically produced" was taken away and instead, the underlying environmental aspects, such as the use of pesticides, the effect on the biodiversity and the importance of the mode of transport, were highlighted. In March 2010, the revised guidelines were submitted to the Swedish Government, which now has decided not to bring the proposal forward to the EU.

NFA believes that major revisions to the guidelines would water them down to the point where they would not be useful to consumers. In addition, NFA would no longer have scientific grounds for their guidelines. The National Food Administration's climate friendly food choices are the first of their kind in the EU and the issue has received a lot of attention. Reportedly, the UK, Denmark and Norway are currently working on similar guidelines. NFA is now considering how they will proceed with this issue.

For background see: Gain Report SW9015 – Sweden First to Propose Guidelines for Climate Effective Food Choice